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ABSTRACT

Assessment and educational programing for linguistically different children who are also experiencing developmental disability is complicated by a number of controversial issues, including lack of developmental data on the course of bilingual language acquisition and the problem of differentiating between a language disorder and linguistic interference. A brief review of research on Spanish/English developmental bilingualism is provided, followed by illustrations of individual linguistic abilities in three bilingual children experiencing developmental problems. It is concluded that research does not support the notion of a linguistic delay due to child bilingualism. The three case studies of three boys (aged 4 1/2, 8, and 9 years) indicate that bilingual proficiency cannot be considered beyond the grasp of a developmentally disabled child. (Author/DB)

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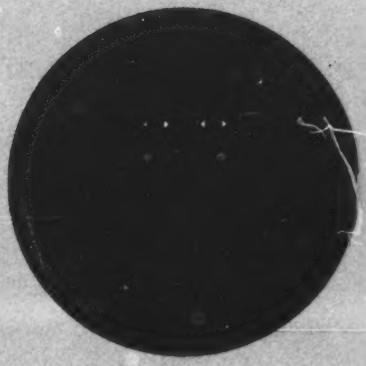

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SPECIFYING THE NEEDS OF A "BILINGUAL" DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED POPULATION: ISSUES AND CASE STUDIES

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SPECIFYING THE NEEDS OF A "BILINGUAL" DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED POPULATION: ISSUES AND CASE STUDIES*

Mel Greenlee

ABSTRACT

Assessment and educational programming for linguistically different children who are also experiencing developmental disability is complicated by a number of controversial issues, including lack of developmental data on the course of bilingual language acquisition and the problem of differentiating between a language disorder and linguistic interference. A brief review of research on Spanish/English developmental bilingualism is provided, followed by illustrations of individual linguistic abilities in three "bilingual" children experiencing developmental problems.

Linguistic and cognitive assessment of children whose home language is not English involves a number of complex issues. A primary concern is the accuracy of assessment procedures, since a disappropriate number of linguistically different children have been labeled deficient in cognitive development or in academic skills (De Avila and Havassy, 1975).

A second issue is the relationship between child bilingualism and cognitive development. Although older studies of bilingual children tended to characterize bilingualism as a hindrance, the

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majority of recent studies have shown positive effects of bilingualism in a number of intellectual tasks, including conservation (for reviews, see Cummins, 1978a, 1978b; De Avila and Duncan, 1979; MacNab, 1979; Padilla, 1977). Educational methods of promoting and measuring balanced bilingualism are currently controversial, and in actual practice, the term "bilingual" includes a very great range of linguistic proficiency (De Avila and Duncan, 1979).

A third issue, lack of developmental data, is particularly important for Spanish/English-speaking children. Information on the acquisition of Spanish in either a monolingual or bilingual setting has only begun to emerge in the last decade (Redlinger, 1979; Van Naerssen, 1979). A ticklish problem in clinical assessment of Spanish-speaking children is whether an instance of developmental delay or language disorder can be reliably differentiated from linguistic interference (Wyszewianski-Langdon, 1977).

A final issue concerns program recommendations. If it can be agreed that bilingual proficiency is an apparent cognitive advantage for normally developing children, should bilingualism be considered in designing educational programs for linguistically different developmentally disabled children? A widespread belief in the field of language disorders appears to be that difficulties experienced in learning and maintaining two languages may further delay the progress of a developmentally disabled child. Thus, a monolingual environment may be encouraged, even at the expense of the child's home language.

Of these many complex issues, this paper will emphasize those related to language disorders in a Spanish/English-speaking popula-

tion. In the first section, studies of children acquiring Spanish and English will be briefly reviewed. The second section will illustrate the heterogeneity of linguistic skills and different program requirements of "bilingual" developmentally disabled children through three case descriptions.

SPANISH/ENGLISH DEVELOPMENTAL STUDIES

Investigations of children's Spanish in the United States have been primarily concerned with grammatical structures (e.g., Brisk, 1974; Gonzalez, 1975; Toronto, 1976). Aside from the study of early vocabulary (Cornejo, 1973), there has been relatively little research on semantic or on developmental pragmatics in early Spanish; studies of discourse have begun in bilingual Spanish/English children (Garcia and Carrasco, in press).

Bilingual acquisition of Spanish and English has been investigated by Padilla and his colleagues in a number of studies (Lindholm and Padilla, 1978; Padilla, 1978; Padilla and Liebman, 1975; Padilla and Lindholm, 1976). An early report (Padilla and Liebman, 1975) showed that the rate of structural development, as measured in mean length of utterance (MLU), was not adversely affected by bilingualism. The bilingual subjects showed similar grammatical features to those observed in monolingual Spanish and English learners at a comparable stage of development (17-26 months).

Padilla and Lindholm (1976) expanded the scope of research to a larger number of children, with a wider age range (19, aged 2 to 6.4 years). Features of interest included sentence types--negation and questions--as well as possessives and modifiers. Bilingual

children were similar to monolingual English learners in early use of WH questions, such as what/*qué* and where/*dónde*; and most of the modifiers were acquired at about the same time in both languages. Padilla (1978) found that the order in which 14 English grammatical morphemes appeared in bilingual children was similar to acquisition orders developed from studies of monolingual English learners (Brown, 1973).

Although it has been hypothesized that bilingual children begin language acquisition with a single system that is gradually differentiated (Volterra and Taeschner, 1978), Lindholm and Padilla (1978) found little evidence of language mixing: only three percent of the subjects' utterances contained both Spanish and English. However, the authors speculated that this low percentage could be at least partially attributed to the methodology of data collection in which children spoke with two "monolingual" adults.

Not all studies of Spanish/English have confirmed the low percentage of language mixing shown by children in Lindholm and Padilla's research (1978). Nevertheless, detailed investigations of children's code-switching have shown that even preschool children use language shifts in a systematic way (Lance, 1975; McClure, 1977). Moreover, children, like adults, may signal sociolinguistic meaning through the use of code-switching (Gumperz and Hernández-Chávez, 1975). Padilla (1977) concluded that "the notion that child bilingualism creates a situation where the child cannot speak either language adequately and, as a consequence, speaks a hybrid mixture of the two languages, must be rejected" (p. 117).

In summary, research does not support the notion of a linguistic delay due to child bilingualism. Children acquiring both Spanish and English have been shown to learn linguistic structures at a comparable rate to that of their monolingual peers. In addition to the structural independence which these children apparently maintain between their two languages, bilingual children seem to learn very early to exploit the sociolinguistic and discourse functions that code-switching serves in the adult community. Comparative research is needed to determine linguistic similarities or differences between children who have acquired English through instruction at early school age.

Wyszewianski-Langdon (1977) has shown that it is possible to identify bilingual children who may be experiencing a language disorder. In a study of six- to eight-year old Puerto Rican children in the Houston area, she observed that:

> ...there is evidence that some children are capable of maintaining and progressing in both languages, while others are struggling in the second language, and often in the first language as well. (pp. 55-56)

Language disordered children in Wyszewianski-Langdon's study made more errors in both Spanish and English than their normal-speaking peers. In particular, the language disordered group performed worse on tests of sentence repetition and comprehension, two tasks which are commonly included in clinical language assessment batteries (e.g., Toronto *et al.*, 1975). In order to avoid interpreting interference as a language disorder, Wyszewianski-Langdon (1977) conducted parallel assessment in each language. This parrallel testing provided valuable information on children's control of lin-

guistic forms, but we do not know to what extent sociolinguistic and discourse rules--parameters of language use--might be controlled in the disordered group.

CASE SKETCHES

In assessment of the three children to be presented in this section, both language form and language use were examined. Each of the children was evaluated for developmenal disability at a university-affiliated psychiatric hospital by several members of an interdisciplinary medical team. Psychological evaluation was conducted, using a non-verbal measure and/or a pluralistic psychological test battery, in an individual session with a Spanish-speaking examiner. Children's language was assessed through formal tests as well as language samples collected in informal conversations with family members and the examiner (E) who spoke both Spanish and English.

Hector

Hector was about four and a half years old at the time his language was evaluated. He is a second-generation Mexican-American whose family uses Spanish at home. Although some very broad classification schemes might include Hector as a "bilingual" child, his proficiency in English is limited to single words embedded in Spanish, e.g., "*Mira, ese* mine" (Look, that mine) or "*Mira,* chicken" (Look, chicken).

Hector's Spanish had several features symptomatic of developmental delay. His utterances were short (MLU = 1.78) and tele-

graphic, usually lacking function words and inflections. Inflected forms that did occur were apparently monomorphemic (e.g., the *s* of [*patos*]; adult *zapatos*, shoes, was not used productively). Meanings expressed by Hector were similar to those which have been documented in Stage I speech in several languages (Brown, 1973). These included possessive (e.g., *bebe eso*, baby that), locative or notice (*aqui wau wau*, here bow-wow), and recurrence (*oto eso*, another that). Over-extensions of vocabulary items (Clark, 1974) also indicate that Hector is at an early stage of language development; e.g., *vaca* (cow) was used to name dogs and horses as well as cows.

The most striking feature of Hector's language was his incorporation of words into sequences of communicative gestures. For example, in order to get the examiner to look at herself in a hand mirror, Hector said *espejo*, *tu espejo* (mirror, you mirror) and mimed the appropriate actions. A picture of a saw he described as *Papá así*, *mira* (Papa, like this, look) with appropriate sawing motions. Hector's apt use of gestures combined with telegraphic utterances indicate that he is attempting to communicate complex messages; but for unknown reasons, he has not learned the formal linguistic means to do so. In order to corroborate the intended complexity of these messages, information about Hector's comprehension of Spanish would be important. However, results of comprehension testing were inconclusive.

School placement for Hector is problematical, since at the time of his evaluation, the team could not locate a setting in which both of his apparent needs could be met, i.e., interaction

with his teacher in Spanish and language intervention. Hector's difficulties with the form of language in his native Spanish would argue that the most appropriate intervention setting would enhance expressive Spanish, introducing formal alternatives from a second language cautiously only after progress has been documented in the first. For Hector, the goal of bilingual proficiency seems far removed from his actual stage of language development.

Tomás

Tomás, age eight, has learned English as a second language. At the time he was seen, Tomás was receiving language intervention in English while Spanish was used at home. On a vocabulary measure of language dominance (James, 1974), Tomás showed similar performance in Spanish and English. Comprehension of syntactic structures (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1973) revealed difficulties with verb tenses, number agreement, and descriptive adjectives. In both English and Spanish tests of sentence and story comprehension, Tomás had numerous errors, which indicate that his receptive language is delayed with respect to his chronological age.

Tomás used short utterances (MLU = 2.5) in which obligatory elements were usually missing. Omission of functors and inflections was also observed in sentence repetitions. Examples are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

EXAMPLES OF SENTENCE REPETITION RESPONSES GIVEN BY TOMÁS

	Spanish	English
S* :	*No trates de correr recio.*	I want to go to school to see my friends.
R**:	*No trates correr recio.*	I want to go to school see friends.
S :	*Papá me quiere llevar al parque.*	Jeff is going to town.
R :	*Papá quiere llevar a parque.*	Jeff going town.
S :	*Elsa comió todas las galletas.*	Somebody has been sleeping.
R :	*El comió toda galleta.*	Somebody sleeping.

*Stimulus sentence spoken by the adult.

**Response given by Tomás.

On the other hand, Tomás said some surprisingly long and complete sentences when he was asked to describe pictures. Spanish and English examples are shown in Table 2.

The comparative length of the utterances in Table 2 can be explained by the influence of English language intervention, which emphasizes "using correct grammar and word order in simple sentences, such as *the boy is reading the book*," according to a report from his school speech and language pathologist. The picture description task evidently elicited a "school speech" register, which has been at least partially transferred from English into his na-

Table 2

LONGER UTTERANCES PRODUCED BY TOMÁS IN PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS

Spanish*	English
Ella lavar lavando a pelo.	The girl is typing.
(She washing hair)	The boy is seeing the ears.
San hablando, agarrando manos.	The girl is put gasoline the car.
(They are talking, holding hands)	
Gente está comprando.	
(People are buying)	

*English translation is given in parentheses.

tive language. Instances of linguistic interaction or interference were otherwise rare in Tomás' conversations; he was also able to respond appropriately, if not always correctly, to requests for translations.

Tomás would seem to fit Wyszewianski-Langdon's (1977) description of a child who is "struggling" not only in English, but also in Spanish. However, his language was clearly sensitive to sociolinguistic constraints, and a full picture of his linguistic competence would emerge only by sampling several speech situations. If intervention is to be continued, periodic checks on the extent of transfer would be crucial in order to more finely tune the goals of the training program.

Oswaldo

Oswaldo, age nine, was the most advanced of the three children in use of English and Spanish syntax. Although his speech was certainly not error-free, it was more complex than might have been expected on the basis of his medical diagnosis: mental retardation associated with a seizure disorder and a left encephalic cyst. Table 3 provides English and Spanish examples of syntactic maturity in Oswaldo's conversations.

In order to fully determine Oswaldo's mastery of syntactic rules, it would be important to show that he is able to understand as well as produce constructions such as those indicated in Table 3. This was not confirmed in comprehension testing; Oswaldo had considerable difficulty in following two-part instructions and had clearly not acquired complex relations involving transitivity.

Oswaldo's ability to separate English and Spanish improved over the course of observation. Despite his English school placement when first seen, his usual response to questions was in Spanish. About five months later, he was able to use code-switching appropriately and to initiate and follow language shifts with a bilingual interviewer. Nevertheless, his choice of language was not perfectly consistent, and he rarely responded correctly when asked to translate.

Table 3

EXAMPLES OF SYNTACTIC MATURITY IN OSWALDO'S SPEECH

Spanish*	English
¿Mi papá se acuesta y luego qué hace?	Let me put it on.
(My papa goes to bed, and then what does he do?)	What's in my mouth?
*Me trajeron desde el enfermado.***	It's time to go upstairs. Put that duck away.
(They brought me from the home.)	Can you roll it?
Mi mamá se fué con María a un mandado.	But the bus is not here yet.
(My mama went on an errand with Maria.)	

*English translation is given in parentheses.

**Cf. adult *internado* (group home).

Oswaldo's conversations were characterized by frequent repetitions and routines, examples of which are shown in Table 4.

Repetitions of others' utterances appeared to be used as a strategy for processing incoming information in either language. Oswaldo also repeated his own utterances, tending to persevere in contextually inappropriate topics and linguistic forms across many intervening stretches of dialogue. Table 4 shows that some of Oswaldo's routines are conventional (e.g., "thank you"), while others are peculiar to his own idiolect (e.g., the "purpose-clause"). In themselves, routines and repetitions are not "patho-

Table 4

ROUTINES AND REPETITION IN OSWALDO'S SPEECH

Repetition of Adult Questions*

Adult: Where were you this afternoon?

O: This afternoon?

Adult: Yeah. Where *were* you?

O: Were me?

Adult: Um-humm (Yes, go on).

O: Yeah.

Adult: Where were you?

O: Were me?

Adult: Um-humm.

O: Right here.

Adult: *En antes de venir aquí, ¿dónde estabas?*

(Before coming here, where were you?)

O: *¿Dónde estaba yo?*

(Where was I?)

[Turning to his sister]

¿Dónde estaba yo, María?

(Where was I, Maria?)

Sample Routines

1. "Thank you"

O: Say thank you.

Adult: Thank you.

O: (prompting) Very much! (sing-song)

******

O: Thank you.

Adult: You're welcome.

O: Very much! (sing-song)

2. "Purpose-Clause"

Adult: What's this one here?

O: That's hands... for washing it like that, for soap (mimes washing his hands).

******

O: What's this?

Adult: I think it's a bed.

O: For what?

******

*Utterances listed form one continuous dialogue in which the adult switched to Spanish after Oswaldo failed to answer in English.

Table 4 (Continued)

Sample Routines

O: *Mamá, ¿qué es esto?*
(Mama, what's this?)

Mama: *Es un sofá.* (It's a sofa.)

O: *En dónde...para sentarnos.*

(Where...for us to sit down.)

logical," since both first- and second-language learners make use of them (Peck, 1978). On the other hand, the frequency of formulas in Oswaldo's conversation, coupled with his apparent lack of comprehension, may reflect his organic impairment.

SUMMARY

The three cases sketched above show that very different linguistic abilities may be found among "bilingual" children experiencing developmental problems. The three children differ in control of language form as well as in appropriateness of language use. Hector has little or no apparent command of English. For Tomás, parallel difficulties are found in both languages. Oswaldo shows syntactically sophisticated language which is pragmatically aberrant. Yet, both Tomás and Oswaldo were able to separate the two codes and use code-switching. Although the evidence presented has been largely anecdotal, it does not indicate that bilingual proficiency must always be considered beyond the grasp of a child experiencing developmental disability. Rather, individual children may have achieved this goal to varying degrees. It remains for

further research to specify the appropriateness of dual language proficiency in light of *individual* children's linguistic strengths.

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